The Ottoman Empire's Economic and Military Legacy:

How Resource Utilization, Trade, and Innovation Shaped European Exploration, Military, and Global Systems, and Their Continuing Influence on Today's Global Economy and Geopolitics.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reconceptualizes the Ottoman Empire not as a reactive power in global history renowned for its sweeping and swift conquests over the Balkan region and unrivaled dominion over three continents, but as a central architect of modernity through its resource utilization, strategic trade control/policy, military innovation and indirect facilitation of the Age of Exploration. By strategic monopolization of key Afro-Eurasian chokepoints, the Ottomans unintentionally forced European powers into an outwards pivot with the incentive to find a bypass of the Ottoman chokepoints such as the Silk Road through the Ottoman capital of Istanbul. These chain of events ultimately led to the European colonization of India and South-East Asia coupled with the discovery of the Americas. Drawing from Ottoman archival sources, contemporary secondary sources, European navigation records and extensive trade-flow modelling, this study argues that the empire's geopolitical and economic supremacy (initiated with the Conquest/Fall of Constantinople in 1453 and sustained

till the 17th century) served as a catalyst for sustainable global systems and compelled the Iberian maritime breakthroughs. The paper introduces the concepts of **Strategic Displacement** and **Chokepoint Imperialism** to explain how Ottoman strength shaped the global economics and geopolitical structure. The legacy of Ottoman imperial design continues to echo in today's global economy through port geopolitics, resource routes and Eurasian diplomacy alongside Ottoman military innovations laying foundational doctrines still reflected in modern military organization and strategy. This paper proposes a paradigm shift: the Ottoman Empire was not the so-called "sick man of Europe" but as a concealed yet crucial catalyst of the modern global order.

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the biased historiographical tradition framed the Ottoman Empire as reactive, defined by territorial conquests, religious absolutism (in the form of "Jihad bi'l-saif": Jihad by the sword) and economic stagnation as the "sick man of Europe", extensively marginalizing its intellectual and institutional sophistication.[1] However, Casale shows how the Ottomans (after conquering Egypt in 1517) challenged Portuguese dominance in the Indian Ocean through naval, commercial and ideological initiatives such as the Ottoman Alliance with the Sultanate of Aceh against the Portuguese who were seeking to establish a monopoly of the lucrative spice trade. [2][3] Likewise, Faroqhi reveals Ottoman diplomacy, finance, culture and

[1] Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5, 33–36, 69–72, 121.

[2] Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3–5.

[3] Peacock, A. (2018, March 28). The Ottoman Empire and the Indian Ocean. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History.

religious networks that spanned Asia and Europe, demonstrating their deeper and consequential role in shaping their global order. [4] Recent scholarship has begun to reevaluate the non-European powers in global history, yet the Ottomans remain undervalued as the hidden force of structural change beyond their imperial borders. [5] This paper invites a paradigm shift: rather than viewing the empire as a late-medieval obstacle to European modernity, we should understand the Ottomans as the core architects of that very modernity. The empire's decisive control over resources, chokepoints and military structures set into motion the very dynamics that formed global capitalism (e.g Suftaja credit systems), an era of colonial expansion and geopolitical systems that persist to this day.[6][7]

Historical analysis confirm that Ottoman Conquests disrupted Europe's long serving eastern trade routes, forcing the Iberian powers to seek new seaways. Emre Evren notes that by the mid-15th century the Ottomans "occupied strategically important territories...separating western Europe from far eastern trade routes", especially considering Ottoman control over the Bosporus and Egypt.[8] Subsequently, Portugal and Spain diverged their trade routes to alternative maritime bypasses. A UNESCO Silk road's study precisely observes that the Portugal ultimately "blockaded the entrance to the Red Sea and divert[ed] [Asian] supplies via the Cape of Good Hope instead of via the Mediterranean," therefore opening a new trade route to Asian spices.[9](This shift set in motion the voyages by Vasco da Gama

[4] Suraiya Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 9–12
[5] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia*, Modern Asian Studies 31, no. 3 (1997): 735–762.
[6] Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2–3, 54–59.
[7] Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chaps. 5–7, esp. 82–85.
[8] Emre Evren, "Transport History of the Ottoman Empire: An Overview," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 1, no. 19 (December 2011): 40–41
[9] UNESCO, "Maritime Routes of the Silk Roads: Spice Trade Routes in the 15th and 16th Centuries," *Silk Roads Programme*, accessed October 2025

around Africa and Christopher Columbus westward ultimately leading to the discovery of the Americas). Yerasimos argues that even before the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Ottomans were meticulously executing their plans designed to insert themselves on the East-West trade route.[10] In 1454, an agreement was signed with the Venetians, imposing custom duties on them for the first time. This agreement stands out as one of the first clearly documented, major diplomatic trade agreements between a European power and a major Muslim empire - with fixed tariff rates, codified in writing. Having severed the Black Sea trade from the Mediterranean by capturing the straits of Bosphorus, Ottomans proceeded to extend their reign over weakened regions of Eastern Anatolia and the Crimea (ibid). Until late eighteenth century, foreign ships were denied entrance into the Black Sea for both economic and military reasons involving the Empire's capital. Almost all of the grain that supplied the capital city of Istanbul came from the Balkans through the Black Sea.[11]

The consequences of these developments were extensive, The Americas, initially a detour around the Ottoman controlled trade chokepoints, became focal point of European colonial extraction, fueling centuries of Atlantic capitalism and consequently leading to the rise of modern global economy. This paper contends that the emergence of the United States as a global superpower (often viewed through European-American exceptionalist frameworks) can be tracked back to Ottoman induced redirection of trade and territorial focus. Without the Ottoman blockade of the East, Europe's westward pivot may have been delayed by decades, if not centuries.[12]

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[10] Stéphane Yerasimos, *Constantinople: De Byzance à Istanbul* (Paris: Éditions Maisonneuve et Larose, 1977), 368.

[11] Bruce McGowan, *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade, and the Struggle for Land, 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.26

[12] Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), Section 2 and 4.

Methodologically, this paper draws on Ottoman archival material, navigation record, resource maps, financial and economic data, and contemporary trade flow and network modeling in the attempts to show that Ottoman control over resources and trade due to military organization indirectly authored the early modern global realignment. Elements of Ottoman imperial logic such as multiethnic management, religious flexibility, financial innovations, infrastructural centralization were later mirrored and adjusted in British and Russian statecraft and, I argue, constitute part of the geopolitical DNA of modern Eurasia.[13] The chapters that follow will put forth the Ottomans as a key player in shaping modern economic, cultural and geopolitical systems.

[13] Karen Barkey, Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chs. 1–3; Suraiya Faroqhi, Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 81–110; Şevket Pamuk, "The Evolution of Financial Institutions in the Ottoman Empire, 1600–1914," Financial History Review 11, no. 1 (2004): 7–32; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), ch. on imperial governance; Gábor Ágoston, "Military Transformation in the Ottoman Empire and Russia,"